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CHAPTER FOUR
Dialogue and epistemological humility

In an increasingly globalized world, policy making involves stakeholders with different interests and value-commitments. There are not only striking differences in values and goals of corporations, industry bodies, government and individuals, but such differences, conflicts, and incommensurabilities are compounded by a diversity in cultural backgrounds. In this light, the search for agreement in global policy making seems defeated from the start.

However, it appears that throughout history thinkers both East and West investigated models of decision-making that could be employed in a situation or radical disagreement, i.e., where stakeholders do not share any commitments as to the values, goals, or even procedural standards, on which the decision could be based. My aim in this paper is to draw attention to an early Chinese exploration of the role of dialogue in decision-making under radical disagreement. The *Zhuangzi*, a text[63] from the Warring States period (457-221 BCE) in China, makes insightful comments about the driving force of vested interests in the debates of his day. Each of the early thinkers was keen to push his own view. While the thinkers then were not concerned with issues in our current global policy discussions, Zhuangzi's suggestions remain relevant. In describing the state of play in the debate between the Confucians and the Mohists (two groups of thinkers who proposed different solutions to the unrest then), Zhuangzi could have been describing the nature of disagreement in our contemporary world:

> ... we have the 'That's it, that's not' of Confucians and Mohists, by which what is *it* for one of them for the other is not, what is *not* for one of them for the other is (*Zhuangzi*, ch. 2; transl. Graham 2001: 52).

The disagreement between the Confucians and the Mohists was deep-seated: what one affirmed the other denied and *vice versa*. The aim of dialogue for these early Chinese thinkers was misdirected: dialogue for them was reduced to debate, in which the aim was to win. If this is the case, how might we engender

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63 The discussion draws from the text, *Zhuangzi*, named after is alleged author, Zhuangzi (399? – 295? BCE). However, of its thirty three chapters, only the first seven—the "Inner Chapters" (Neipian)—can be more or less properly associated with the ideas of Zhuangzi. The other chapters were written from between the 4th to 2nd centuries BCE, most probably by other thinkers. Refer to two notable discussions of the text, by Graham 2003 and Liu 1995. The discussion here focuses primarily on the arguments in the Inner Chapters.

dialogue? Zhuangzi promotes epistemological awareness by drawing attention to the irreducibly specific and subjective nature of individual perspectives. This awareness involves the acknowledgment that all views have limitations. In this way, the lesson we take from Zhuangzi is not in the typical form of a *solution* to decision problems through dialogue. I suggest that Zhuangzi's ideas promote *epistemological humility*. That is, they prompt a change in the attitude of people so that those entering into an exchange of views understand the nature of their own biases.[64] This is not a guarantee of success (indeed, we wonder if *any* plausible proposal would make such a claim). It is a proposal for entering into exchanges with a mind that is not already closed.

Zhuangzi on intolerance

During the Warring States period in China, when sections of the *Zhuangzi* and many other texts were written, there were so many competing doctrines that the phrase 'hundred doctrinal groups' (百家之學 *baijia zhi xue*) was coined to characterize the situation:

> The empire is in utter confusion, sagehood and excellence are not clarified, we do not have the one Way and Power ... There is an analogy in the ears, eyes, nose and mouth; all have something they illuminate but they cannot exchange their functions, just as the various specialties of the Hundred Schools [*baijia*] all have their strong points and at times turn out useful. However, they are not inclusive, not comprehensive; these are men each of whom has his own little corner. (*Zhuangzi* ch. 2; transl. Graham 2001: 275).[65]

Here, we sense the author's dismay at the confusion in the debates. The proposed solutions were grounded in incompatible ideals of government, society and human good. Yet, in spite of differences in their ideals, many believed that the solution laid in the establishment of a common standard—that is, the one they each proposed. Indeed, the quest for *one* Way (*dao*)—a single solution to

64 I use the terms 'bias' and 'partial,' in relation to perspectives, with caution as I do not wish to suggest that Zhuangzi's response to these views is to propose their opposites: unbiased, or impartial perspectives.

65 This passage is found in the *Zhuangzi* text, although the chapter is not one that we can attribute without doubt to Zhuangzi. Graham, who analyses the composition of the *Zhuangzi*, believes that chapter 33 was written by a group of thinkers called the "Syncretists". The early Syncretists were keen to promote the Way of Heaven—that is, its cosmic patterns—as a model for administrative hierarchy. In *Zhuangzi* 33, Zhuangzi's philosophy is criticized for its lack of attention to practical affairs. (Graham 2003: 94-101).

the unrest embraced by all—is expressly stated in the passage. In their debates, standards were applied to a wide range of human activities including craftsmanship, decorum, social practices and the meanings of terms in language. Above all, for many of the thinkers, the implementation of standards was crucial to stability; it also served as the rationale for their particular conceptions of government.[66]

The assertion of each doctrine was accompanied by intolerance of difference and plurality as indicated in the tone of the passage itself. Zhuangzi devised a number of images and metaphors to cast doubt on the thinkers' assumptions that their individual views were objectively true, that is, independent of (dis)agreement or personal opinion. Instead of engaging with these thinkers about whose doctrine was superior—and hence adding another doctrine to the list—he questioned their underlying assumptions by challenging their epistemological naiveté.

What is meant by intolerance as it is used here? While the *Zhuangzi* does not have a term or phrase that may be translated as 'intolerance,' Zhuangzi's discussion of the *attitudes* of those asserting the correctness of the views is what I wish to capture by the term:

> In interactions, there is plotting and scheming, and daily there is the striving of heart-mind [*xin*] with heart-mind. There are hesitancies, concealments, and reservations. Small apprehensions cause restless distress; great apprehensions produce endless fears. Where their utterances are like arrows from a bow, we have those who feel it their charge to pronounce what is right [*shi*] and what is wrong [*fei*]. Where they are given out like the conditions of a covenant, we have those who maintain their views, determined to overcome.[67]

According to Zhuangzi, the pronouncements of "*shi*" (是Aye! True!) and "*fei*" (非Nay!) were accompanied by determination, or obsession, to prove that one's view was the correct one (Wong 2005). These attitudes were inextricably bound up with each person's belief in what was right and what wrong. They incorporated attitudes of approval and disapproval of particular situations and states of affairs (Hansen 2003b). Each doctrine affirmed a particular set of beliefs as correct—*shi*—and denied—*fei*—what was not compatible with those that were correct. The Confucians *shi*(-ed) their own view and *fei*(-ed) that of the Mohists and *vice versa*.

66 Two concepts at the centre of these discussions were *fa* (standard) and *ming* (names). Refer to Makeham 1994, Graham 1989 and Schwartz 1985.

67 "...與接為搆，日以心鬬。縵者，窖者，密者。小恐惴惴，大恐縵縵。其發若機栝，其司是非之謂也；其留如詛盟，其守勝之謂也 ..." (Zhuangzi "Qiwulun," (齊物論) Guo Qingfan, 1961: vol. 1: 51. Author's translation; adapted from the translation by Legge 1891: 178-9).

Zhuangzi was sceptical of the assumptions about language and its capacity to reflect reality as upheld by some thinkers (Lai 2008: 63-9). There was in particular a group of thinkers dubbed the "later Mohists" who sought to quell disagreement by setting fixed correspondences between (specific terms in) language and (aspects of) the world (Lai 2008: 111-41). Zhuangzi was concerned that matters concerning the rectification of society were reduced to projects to standardize name-referent correspondence. He believed that attitudes about the superiority of one's own beliefs, not mismatches of language with the world, were the primary cause of division. The method the thinkers were using to resolve their disagreements, by each asserting the correctness of his own view (the "this-not this" approach) is not only arbitrary, it simplistically dichotomizes issues:

> It is by a 'That's it' [*shi*] which deems that a boundary is marked. Let me say something about the marking of boundaries. You can locate as there and enclose by a line, sort out and assess, divide up and discriminate between alternatives, compete over and fight over ... To 'divide' [*fen*], then, is to leave something undivided: to 'discriminate between alternatives' [*bian*] is to leave something which is neither alternative ... Hence I say: 'To "discriminate between alternatives" is to fail to see something.' (*Zhuangzi*, ch. 2; transl. Graham 2001: 57)

Zhuangzi's criticisms stem in part from his concern about their objective to reduce diversity to homogeny.[68] Once a winning view had been decided upon, it was put forward as if it were a pronouncement and considered binding on everyone. There was no room for difference.

Situating the doctrines and responding to them

How does the *Zhuangzi* understand the doctrines, each with their specific set of affirmations and denials, of approvals and disapprovals? To answer this question, we turn to Chapter 2 of the *Zhuangzi* text, the *Qiwulun* (齊物論), which is the chapter most concerned with epistemological issues. In the first instance,

68 In this passage, Zhuangzi discusses the attempts to make clear distinctions using methods such as *fen* and *bian*. While *fen* more closely resembles classification, *bian* involves refining distinctions. The later Mohists also made other sets of distinctions according to what could be affirmed or not (*ke-buke*), what was similar or different (*tong-yi*), so or not-so (*ran-buran*) (Lai 2008: 111-141). The Mohist conception of knowledge centres on how a person applies these distinctions in practice. For the Mohists, knowledge is not about the accumulation of information but its practical applications. To know something is to be able to distinguish it—(*bian*) to pick it out—from others. Hansen discusses the skill of pattern recognition and making distinctions in Mohist philosophy (1992: 104ff).

the title of the chapter itself—*Discourse on the equalisation of all things*—is revealing. *What* is equalized, and *how* is it equalized? A passage in the *Qiwulun* seems to indicate equal regard for—that is, no preference for any one of—the *shi-fei* views:

> Therefore while a *shi* picks out a stalk from a pillar, a hag from beautiful Xi Shi, things peculiar or incongruous, (from the perspective of) *dao* (a person) sees through them and deems them one ... Only the accomplished person knows how to see through them and deem them one; that which deems according to *shi* he does not use but lodges them in the ordinary [the day-to-day]. To understand the ordinary [nature of the views] is to understand their use. To understand their use is to see through them. To see through them is to grasp them. (*Zhuangzi*, ch. 2).[69]

From the perspective of *dao* the *shi-fei* views are deemed one (*yi*一). What does it mean to deem all things one? There are two fundamental ways to understand this statement. The first is a metaphysical thesis, that the 'one-ness' is the unity between the oppositional views. One such account is offered by Thomas Radice, for example, who argues that Zhuangzi offers a way of life built upon a realisation of the fundamental unity of opposites (Radice 2001: 33).[70] This view is problematic as Zhuangzi in this same chapter also expresses scepticism about the possibility of an impartial perspective or one that is a view from nowhere (*Zhuangzi*, ch. 2; Graham 2001: 60; Lai 2006).

The second thesis treats 'one-ness' as an epistemological assertion whereby the doctrines are seen *as epistemologically equal*: no one particular assertion of *shi-fei* is better than the others. Here, I draw on the title of the chapter, "*Discourse on the equalisation of all things*," to suggest that the term '*yi*' means 'equal' or 'same'. On this account, Zhuangzi's evaluation of the doctrines of the Confucians and the Mohists is that they are each limited by what they individu-

69 "故為是舉莛與楹，厲與西施，恢恑憰怪，道通為一 ... 唯達者知通為一，為是不用而寓諸庸。庸也者，用也；用也者，通也；通也者，得也." (Zhuangzi "Qiwulun," (齊物論) Guo Qingfan, 1961: vol. 1: 69-71. Author's translation, adapted from Graham 2001: 53-4). I have interpreted 通 (tong) in '道通為一' as '[to] see through' to capture the sense of access and attainment embodied in the term. The Shuo Wen Jie Zi, a classical dictionary compiled by Xu Shen (100-121), expresses通 in terms of "達也", to arrive at [a particular understanding] (卷三, 辵部, 1133). This explication of 通 incorporates the phrase in this passage, namely, that the accomplished person (達者) sees through things and deems them one. The allusion to see-ing foreshadows the notion of illumination discussed later in the paper.

70 I describe this as a metaphysical account because it incorporates metaphysical commitments; Radice articulates the notion *dao* in terms of a 'natural order'. In his analysis, the *shifei* distinctions "threaten the survival of the individual and the natural order of *dao*." (Radice 2001: 39).

ally can grasp. At one point in the chapter, Zhuangzi cleverly represents the limiting nature of individual perspectives using the terms 'this' (自 *zi*) and 'that' (彼 *bi*): 'this' refers to my own perspective while 'that' to another's perspective. From another person's point of view, however, 'this' and 'that' are reversed: what I call 'this' is what he would call 'that' and *vice-versa*:

> There is nothing that is not the "that" and there is nothing that is not the "this". Things do not know that they are the "that" of other things; they only know what they themselves know (*Zhuangzi*, ch. 2, trans. Chan 1963: 182).

Zhuangzi used indexical terms—terms whose meanings change relative to a context or vantage point—to illuminate the insularity of individual points of view. Zhuangzi's scepticism, unlike that of Descartes', is not concerned about the potentially illusory nature of sense perceptions. For Zhuangzi, it is not that individual perspectives might be erroneous (Soles and Soles 1998) but that they are partial *while at the same time purporting to stand in for the correct view.*[71]

If we follow this line of argument, the perspectives of all—humans, other animals, Peng, the cicada and the dove—are each limited. To say they are equal is not to say they are all limited in the *same way* but that there is no single point of view that is unobscured by a person's particular way of seeing things. Each view has specific limitations. Hence no proponent can claim that his doctrine is epistemologically superior. From a person's point of view (whether 'this' or 'that), what one knows (which is limited) is taken to constitute knowledge.[72]

In the passage on how the accomplished person deals with the *shi-fei* views, the person who deems the views *equal* does not *use* (*yong* 用) them. He situates (*yu* 寓) them in the commonplace (*yong* 庸). In other words, he understands that the *shi-fei* views operate at the level of ordinary discourse, where the common practice is simply for each person to assert and defend his or her own view.[73]

71 For discussions on scepticism in the literature, see Raphals 1996, Chinn 1997, Trowbridge 2006 and the collection of essays in the anthology edited by Kjellberg and Ivanhoe (1996).

72 This prompts us to ask whether Zhuangzi thinks there is a way of justifying these doctrines. In a passage discussing the adjudication of disputes, Zhuangzi asks: "Whom shall I call in to judge [the *shifei* disputes]? If I get someone of your party to decide it, being already of your party how can he decide it? If I get someone of my party to decide it, being already of my party how can he decide it? If I get someone of a party different from either of us to decide it, being already of a party different from either of us how can he decide it? If I get someone of the same party as both of us to decide it, being already of the same party as both of us how can he decide it? (*Zhuangzi* 2, trans. Graham 2001: 60; annotated by author).

73 In *Zhuangzi* 27, the idea of lodging oneself in a particular perspective is referred to as an argument strategy. (Graham believes this is a chapter whose ideas are reasonably close to those in *Zhuangzi*'s *Qiwulun* chapter (2001: 25)). *Yuyan* (寓言), lodging-place speech, is one of three methods of argumentation. Of the three, lodging-place speech is most prominent, used ninety percent of the time (indeed, the chapter is named after this strategy). *Yuyan* speech is useful, for example, where "persons [are] brought in from outside for the purpose of exposition. A father does not act as go-between for his own son because the praises of the father would not be as effective as the praises of an outsider." (*Zhuangzi* "*Yuyan*" trans. Watson 1968: 303). Lee Yearley proposes that the enlightened person lodges (*yu*) temporarily at the *shi-fei* views in order to understand them and, in this way, sees *yu* as an argumentative device rather than a physical location (Yearley 2005).

However, the accomplished person *sees through* them. Here, it is important to mention A.C. Graham's interpretation of the term *tong* (通) as *'interchange'* in his translation of the passage (2001: 53-4): the accomplished person sees the views as interchangeable. This is not to say that any one of them may replace another. *Interchangeability* relates to the way in which the accomplished person is able to lodge in any one of these perspectives. From each of the perspectives, he appreciates how things seem one particular way (*weishi*為是). This is another way of saying that the *shi-fei* views are indexical. Zhuangzi tells a story of a monkey-keeper who is able to shift between *shi-fei* perspectives:

> A monkey keeper handing out nuts said, 'Three every morning and four every evening.' The monkeys were all in a rage. 'All right then,' he said, 'four every morning and three every evening.' The monkeys were all delighted. Without anything being missed out either in name or in substance, their pleasure and anger were put to use; his too was the 'That's it' [*shi*] which goes by circumstance. This is why the sage smooths things out with his 'That's it, that's not' [*shi, fei*], and stays at the point of rest of the potter's wheel of Heaven. It is this that is called 'Letting both alternatives proceed' (*Zhuangzi* ch. 2; trans. Graham 2001: 54; annotated by author).

The monkeys are unable to shift between the two options; the Daoist scholar Harold Roth notes that "[e]ach developed his own unique viewpoint on the world and came to prefer It and only It and thereby left no room to adopt any Other." (Roth 2003: 22). When the sage 'smooths things out with his *shi* or *fei*,' he does not *use* them in the way the monkeys do (cf. *yong*用). He does not *rely* on the specific perspectival frame as his only point of reference but understands their situatedness—'the *shi* which goes by circumstance'—from his point of rest.[74] The allusion to *perspectives*—to have only one, as in the case of the monkeys, and to be able to *see* from different perspectives, as in the case of the

74 There are important differences between *weishi* (為是) and *yinshi* (因是). The first involves deeming (*wei*) things in a way that is guided *by* a *shi-fei* view. Hence, in the passage on the accomplished person who sees through the *shi-fei* views, we are told that the sage does not use *weishi* (為是不用). However, *yinshi* is important to the sage's treatment of the *shifei* views, where he understands them *on a circumstantial basis*. Roth covers the distinction between *weishi* and *yinshi* meticulously (2003: esp. 22-28).

monkey-keeper or the sage—is important as perception is an important aspect of Zhuangzi's epistemology. As noted previously, perception in Zhuangzi does not concern the veridicality of the senses in gaining access to truth or reality. It is to understand the insularity of perspectives and therefore to understanding one's epistemological shortcomings from any one of these perspectives. The first chapter of the Zhuangzi, "Free and easy wandering," opens with a story about a giant bird whose 'girth measures who knows how many thousand miles'):

> A cicada and a turtle-dove laughed at it, saying, 'We keep flying till we're bursting, stop when we get to an elm or sandalwood, and sometimes are dragged back to the ground before we're there. What's all this about being ninety thousand miles up when he travels south? (trans. Graham: 2001: 43-4).

The little creatures have some grasp of their own physical limitations but they are unaware of how these are *limiting*. From any one of the lodged, *shi-fei* perspectives, it is difficult to see how any other *shi-fei* perspective might be plausible. Zhuangzi is concerned not with *what* a proponent of a *shi-fei* doctrine sees but *how* one sees the *shi-fei* doctrines.

How does the accomplished person regard the *shi-fei* doctrines? Does she judge them? Would, or could, Zhuangzi say that one *shi-fei* doctrine is more plausible or appropriate than another? In another passage in the *Qiwulun*, the place of an accomplished person is characterised in terms of an axis or a pivot (*shu* 樞):

> Where neither It nor Other finds its opposite is called the axis of the Way. When once the axis is found at the centre of the circle there is no limit to responding [*ying*應] with either, on the one hand no limit to what is *it* [*shi*], on the other no limit to what is not [*fei*]. Therefore I say: 'The best means is Illumination [*ming*].' (*Zhuangzi*, Chapter 2, trans. Graham 2001: 53; author's annotations).

From the point of view of the pivot, each of the lodged views has its own terms of reference and therefore the point is not to set them in opposition to each other, as the sparring disputers are keen to do. The Daoist scholar Wu Kuang-ming draws parallels between Zhuangzi's pivot and the idea of an *axis mundi*.[75] On this account, the position on the pivot is an *orientation*. From this position, the illuminated person may switch between the many different doctrines, indeed, to an unlimited number of positions.

The modus operandi of the person at the axis is to *respond* (*ying*應) to the *shi-fei* views rather than to assess the *shi-fei* assertions made from each perspective. One important feature of the pivot position is the *agility* of the person in responding to the different *shi-fei* views, suggested by the circle (*huan* 環). From the axis, all points are equidistant. Interestingly, the notion of circularity also features in the passage on the monkey-keeper, who rests on the *wheel* of Heaven (休乎天鈞). The enlightened view is not about the evaluation of the rightness of each of these views but a method of understanding all of them—it is an *epistemological thesis*.[76]

There is an important metaphor in this passage, that of illumination (*ming* 明). The *response* of the person on the axis is characterized by an illuminated perspective (*yiming* 以明). The term *ming* (明) is comprised by two characters, for sun (*ri*: 日) and moon (*yue* 月), hence signifying light. Drawing on the metaphor of light,[77] I suggest that illumination does not generate objects in and of

75 Wu (1990): 142, 161. Following this line of thought, Alan Fox suggests that "the axis establishes a reference point which provides orientation" (Fox 1996: 65). Fox's analysis of the axis differs from the account here. He focuses on avoidance of dichotomy: "Zhuangzi seems to suggest that it is unnecessary and in fact somewhat dysfunctional to systematically, categorically, and unreflectively prefer one pole of a dichotomy to another" (*ibid*). By contrast, the discussion here does not give precedence to the dichotomous aspect of *shi-fei*, although it does not preclude it. According to the argument in this paper, the Zhuangzi's project involves not only abstinence from having either-or preferences, but also understanding their epistemological inadequacies. Fox also argues that the position of the pivot is associated with "seeing the 'big picture', in which all contradictions are located and resolved" (*ibid*). To reiterate, I argue here that to 'deem the views as one' is not to unify them but to grasp the epistemological limitations of all *shi-fei* views.

76 In the *Zhuangzi*, there is also the metaphor of a mirror, used in relation to the Sage's insight: "The utmost man uses the heart like a mirror; he does not escort things as they go or welcome them as they come, he responds and does not store." (*Zhuangzi*, ch. 7, trans. Graham 2001: 98. Graham argues that the mirror metaphor captures the sense in Daoist thought about the activity of mirroring, which is not 'surrender to passions' but rather 'impersonal calm which mirrors the situation with utmost clarity.' (2001: 14; 16). The detachment of Zhuangzi's sage is consistent with the mood of the entire text and may also explain why Zhuangzi's discussions can sometimes appear to have a playful character. The most thorough articulation of the playful character of Zhuangzi's philosophy is by Kuang-ming Wu (1982).

77 Some scholars interpret *ming* in metaphysical terms to suggest attainment of truth or an unobstructed grasp of reality. This understanding of *ming* corresponds to the view discussed above, of *yi* as the *one enlightened doctrine* (eg. Radice 2001). There are, however, significant concerns about whether the early Chinese philosophers, and Zhuang in particular, were concerned about a notion of truth or reality as articulated in metaphysics in Western philosophy (Hansen 1985; Hansen 1992: 285-92; Soles and Soles 1998). Important discussions about *ming* include the accounts by Lo 1999, Møllgaard 2003, Wenzel 2003 and Yearley 2005. Lo (1999) presents an unconventional interpretation of *yiming*, suggesting that the advice of the *Zhuangzi* text is to *stop* using *ming*: on his account, *ming* is the method used by the disputing thinkers and hence Zhuangzi's point is to stop them.

itself but only brings clarity to what one sees. The person at the pivot *responds* to the *shi-fei* doctrines but does not produce more of these to compete with the existing ones.

According to this account, Zhuangzi's epistemological project is not to determine truth. Hence, he does not advocate relativism because his theory is not concerned with truth or truth-making conditions.[78] Zhuangzi *does* make a judgment: it is not *possible* to determine a set of truth conditions for the proposals to quell the unrest *because* each view is a situated view. His aim is to challenge epistemological complacency. The method appropriate to this task is responsiveness, not the evaluation of views for correctness.

Roth suggests that a person at the pivot position is epistemologically aware in a way that a person who only engages at the *shi-fei* level does not. In Roth's account, to "find lodging-places in daily living" is not to negate *shi-fei* positions. Rather it involves the "relativizing or perspectivizing" of each of them (2003: 29). Roth's description of the pivot position captures a sense of agility in how the illuminated person responds to the *shi-fei* views:

> Dualistic cognition [*shi-fei* knowledge] and propositional knowledge may be useful in certain specific circumstances, but when the circumstances change, as they inevitably do, one must abandon them and allow oneself to respond to the new situation without their determining influence. This yields an awareness that is able to focus completely on what is taking place in the present moment. (2003: 29).

On Roth's interpretation, great understanding is an enviable capacity to possess. The illuminated person not only has greater epistemological insight, she also has the mental agility to respond to new situations more spontaneously. The issue of spontaneity is a major aspect of Zhuangzi's philosophy, and of Daoist philosophy more generally. While it is not within the scope of this discussion to explore it in greater detail, it is important to note that the concept encapsulates the Daoist view of life that is less encumbered with conventional norms and expectations.[79]

78 Interesting discussions of relativism in *Zhuangzi's* philosophy include articles in the two anthologies edited by Kjellberg and Ivanhoe (1996) and Cook (2003).

79 For extended discussions of spontaneity in Daoist philosophy, refer to Fox 1996, Slingerland 2003 and Jullien 2004.

Zhuangzi's insights for dialogues on global policy

In this final section, I suggest two related ways in which these epistemological reflections may inform contemporary global policy discussions. The first is in its treatment of plurality and the second in addressing the attitudes of those engaging in dialogue.

The Zhuangzi text acknowledges the plurality of views and embraces it. At an initial glance, Zhuangzi's endorsement of plurality, in treating the shi-fei views equally, may seem unsustainable. If Zhuangzi's points are understood as a proposal for relativism, its contribution to policy discussions would be minimal. What I have suggested in this chapter runs contrary to a relativist thesis. I propose that the Zhuangzi prompts readers to appreciate the different frames of reference of the views brought into dialogue.

On this approach, instead of abandoning the justification process, the emphasis is on understanding each view in terms of how it is situated. In practical terms, this means that different points of view are seen in light of their assumptions and presuppositions. In fact, contrary to the epistemological tenets underlying relativism, this approach demands rigour. It highlights awareness of the presuppositions that shape any one view.

One important implication of this epistemological insight is that it does not accept that any one view is objectively correct or true. Here, we need to keep in mind that Zhuangzi's epistemology relates to proposed solutions to the unrest in ancient China rather than matters of fact such as, say, measurements of length or distance. Are contemporary global policy dialogues in any way like the debates of Zhuangzi's day? One might be inclined to think that, as contemporary dialogues often include consideration of the data provided by research in the various sciences, that they at least incorporate more objective dimensions. The way current debates on major global policy issues play out, however, run contrary to this expectation. To link up with contributions in part V below, let illustrate this with a quick review of the relevant literature on climate policy. Here it appears that climate change scepticism has been a prominent feature in such discussions in many countries (Dessler and Parson 2010; Pearse 2007; Lorenzoni, Nicholson-Cole, and Whitmarsh 2007; Jacques, Dunlap and Freeman 2008; Boykoff and Boykoff 2007; Antilla 2005). Furthermore, while some of the current debates on climate change are underpinned by political motivations, there are also important academic and intellectual concerns about the *how* the environmental future is conceived and the parameters for assessing it. The point here is not to give credence to those who deny the results of legitimate research

but to note that the atmosphere of discussions—where personal motivations hold sway—is not unlike those in Zhuangzi's day.

Zhuangzi's advice to 'deem the views as one' warns against the simplistic approach taken by the debating thinkers to pit the views one against another. To deem the views as equal is to be mindful that *each* is cramped by particular presuppositions. The point of dialogue is to understand the limitations of each so that advocates of particular views re-assess their claims. Perhaps, if we could converse with the cicada and the turtle-dove, we might point out how their circumstances limit their grasp of the giant bird's capacities and needs.

This approach may already be commonplace in dialogues. However, the important question for Zhuangzi is that of *onus*: typically, in debates, it is the opponent who points out weaknesses in one's views. In Zhuangzi's proposal, however, the onus falls on each person himself or herself to understand their own frames of reference. This is especially important in environmental debates, for example, as it also places the onus on all concerned to question anthropocentricism and other conventional biases that shape and limit points of view. Epistemological self-awareness is at the crux of Zhuangzi's positioning on the pivot. This approach to discussion allows for a variety of views to be aired and does not necessarily see plurality as a threat.

The *attitudes* of those entering into discussion are, for Zhuangzi, a key feature of the pointless debates; this second insight is also relevant to contemporary environmental discussions. Zhuangzi addresses both the epistemological naiveté of the thinkers and their intolerant attitudes. The scenario of the Confucians and Mohists engaged in pointless debates, the simile of the giant bird and small creatures (and many others in the text that suggest the significance of perspective to understanding), the use of lodging-place strategy in argumentation and the metaphors of the pivot and illumination, are central to the argument here. These stories and scenarios prompt readers of the text further to consider the perspective of the *other*. While some of them place the reader in a third-party observer's position (as for instance in observing the cicada and turtle-dove and the monkeys), the passage on this ('self,' *zi*) and that ('other,' *bi*) involves the reader directly. It reminds the self (this) that it is the other's 'that' and *vice versa*. This challenge to *respond* (*ying*) to the other by standing in another person's shoes is an important *ethical* implication of epistemological awareness.

While it does not necessarily follow that all readers of Zhuangzi's philosophy will be humbled through the exercise of assessing their own beliefs as one among others, the challenge is an interesting one as it approaches the issue of intolerance from an epistemological point of view. Interestingly, in this way, Zhuangzi's discussions *turn the tables* on those who are intolerant of others' beliefs. He places the onus on the intolerant person to examine her epistemological assumptions.

This also means that the challenge from *Zhuangzi* does not confront a person's beliefs in the way the *shi-fei* debates do, by thrusting competing sets of beliefs against what a person believes. In line with that, the aim of this essay is not to suggest a *solution* to contemporary global policy discussions for it would be naïve to expect that a text from the 4th century BCE might have *answers* to the complex issues of our modern world. Hence, the insights of the text lie in its emphasis on epistemological awareness and the process of dialogue rather than its promotion of particular goals. The approach offered here encourages individuals to take on different perspectives. By doing so, it addresses the attitudes with which people *enter into* dialogue. It is one that anticipates plurality rather than conformity and that is open to a viewpoint that is different from one's own. Such an attitude is especially important in environmental dialogues, although it is by no means restricted to discussions in this field alone.

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